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ABSTRACT

Despite improvements in child care regulations and in the availability of child care since the 1972 landmark study on the country's child care delivery system, the current child care system still fails working parents and their children even as families are becoming more reliant on it. This document synthesizes recent research showing the educational and developmental benefits of good quality child care and provides a call to action to those who support children's rights to safe and enriching early childhood care. The major points of the report are as follows: (1) demand for child care is exploding; (2) the cost of child care is prohibitive; (3) good quality care is essential for all; (4) numerous barriers to quality care remain; (5) lack of school-age care means higher crime rates; and (6) there are business benefits to understanding employers' responsibility to provide families with access to reliable, affordable, and high-quality care arrangements. The report also makes recommendations to help ensure affordable, accessible, quality child care, and to ensure employer support and consumer education. The report concludes with a statement of principles regarding children's entitlement to quality child care, families' entitlement to affordable child care, the need for additional child care spaces, the need for a livable wage with incentives for professional development for child care workers, the needs for school-age care, the potential role of the business community, and the necessity for government, industry, educators, nonprofit organizations, and parents to commit to a partnership to improve child care options for all families. (KB)

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Opening a New Window on Child Care

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A Report on the
State of Child Care
in the United States

National Council of Jewish Women

NCJW

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Opening a New Window on Child Care

A Report on the
Status of Child Care
in the Nation Today

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of Jewish Women

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Dedication

This report is written in memory of Mary Dublin Keyserling, former Director, Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, and dedicated to Edward Zigler, Ph.D., Sterling Professor of Psychology and Director of the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy.

Mary Keyserling was the author of *Windows on Day Care*, the landmark 1972 report by the National Council of Jewish Women. Her pioneering work has not been forgotten.

Edward Zigler served as the first Director of the Office of Child Development in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare when *Windows on Day Care* was released. His tireless dedication to ensuring quality child care has made him a true champion for America's children and families.

NCJW's Mission

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a volunteer organization, inspired by Jewish values, that works through a program of research, education, advocacy and community service to improve the quality of life for women, children and families and strives to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all.

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We also thank **Lifetime Television** for allowing us to use real-life child care stories collected during their Caring for Kids Campaign.

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Foreword

By Jan Schneiderman, NCJW National President,
and Nan Rich, NCJW Immediate Past National President

In 1972, NCJW issued its groundbreaking report, *Windows on Day Care*, sounding the alarm about severe inadequacies in the child care system. Since then, the country has undergone a virtual social revolution.

Undeniably, the growing number of women in the workplace has changed the family dynamic. Mother is no longer the child's sole caregiver. Today, father, relatives, family friends and, more often than ever, child care organizations, are sharing the task.

More than 50 percent of preschool children are in child care arrangements. Yet, as *Opening a New Window on Child Care* shows, children and their families face a continued scarcity of safe, high-quality and affordable child care. It is a significant problem for most families, whatever their income levels.

This report was written with the assistance of–indeed, at the behest of –prominent educators and child care experts. It is both a progress report and a synthesis of the recent research that shows the educational and developmental benefits of good quality child care. More important, it is a call to action to all those who support children's rights to safe and enriching early childhood care.

For most of NCJW's 107-year history, providing community service and education to improve child care has been central to our organization's mission. Most recently, NCJW has spotlighted the issue with a variety of local and national campaigns, including a three-year, 21-state initiative in the early 1990s to increase the supply of regulated, high-quality, family day care. Speak Out for Children Advocacy Day in 1997 was part of an ongoing nationwide effort to preserve the social safety net for children, and the 1998 Listening to Families Project documented the effects of the new welfare laws on parents and children.

In preparing this report, NCJW is reinvigorating the public debate at the national, state and local levels. We are recommitting ourselves, through our grassroots cadre of skilled community activists, to engage parents, legislators, and community, nonprofit and business leaders in the battle for improved child care.

We hope and expect that in the not-too-distant future parents will be able to make choices in confidence from an array of affordable, high-quality child care alternatives. Until that day, NCJW will continue to ask the important questions about how our nation's substantial resources can be redirected to support quality child care.

December 1999

Introduction

Child care is in crisis. No matter what measures are used–access, quality or affordability–we know that the child care system is failing working parents and their children. Worse yet, it is failing even as families in every income bracket are becoming more reliant on it.

Access

Among the clearest signs of the crisis are reports from across the nation of shrinking access. Everywhere, the strains are evident.

■ In Colorado, hundreds of child care providers earning an average hourly wage of $7.27, often without benefits, left the industry in 1999 for better-paying jobs. The result: 1,300 mostly in-home licensed facilities have closed, and those that remain open are generally filled to capacity. Providers in the state are urging mothers to get on waiting lists as soon as they learn they are pregnant. The director of the state's Department of Human Service's child care division says the crunch on providers is the worst it has ever been.

■ In metropolitan Washington, D.C., the reports are even worse. New mothers–from clerical workers to Pentagon analysts–are paying just to reserve places on waiting lists. Many of the lists require waits of up to 16 months or more. That means before mothers even conceive, they need to begin lining up for child care slots.

■ In Maryland, total capacity for child care centers dropped about 2 percent between 1998 and 1999, while the number of licensed providers fell about 3.5 percent.

■ In Los Angeles County, officials were projecting a shortfall of 150,000 child care slots in 1999 because of staff shortages.

■ In Kansas City, the Metropolitan Council on Child Care says unusually high worker turnover is creating a crunch for open slots. The turnover, more than 42 percent, is surpassed only by the turnover rates of gas station and parking lot attendants. Child care workers in Kansas City make $6 to $7.45 per hour, regardless of their educational level. The pay is less than that of janitorial service workers.

■ At the YMCA, which provides before- and after-school child care for 350,000 children nationally, officials say they cannot expand, even though the organization has space, because they cannot find the workers.

IN 15 STATES, PARENTS ARE PAYING TWICE AS MUCH FOR CHILD CARE AS THEY WOULD SPEND ON PUBLIC COLLEGE TUITION.

Quality

Even if parents could find slots for their children, many would encounter quality of care that is often substandard. The *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study* published in 1995 by researchers at the University of North Carolina, the University of Colorado, UCLA and Yale University, when using commonly accepted measurement tools, reported unacceptably high rates of poor-quality care at child care centers around the nation.

New brain research shows convincingly that poor-quality child care can delay cognitive and language development, make children more vulnerable to illness and affect their ability to establish warm relationships with adults. Put another way, quality child care is an opportunity for *all children* –those who live in poverty and those who live in families with middle incomes–to increase their potential for social and intellectual growth.

Affordability

The cost of child care–even poor-quality child care–is a concern for parents in all social strata. A Children's Defense Fund survey revealed in 1998 that in 15 states, parents are paying twice as much for child care as they would spend on public college tuition. In addition, a 1999 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shows that only 10 percent of children eligible for federal child care assistance in 1998 actually received it.

Of course, the lower a family's income, the greater the burden of paying child care becomes. Nevertheless, the issue of affordability, which many have portrayed simply as a problem for working-class families, is having a noticeable impact on the finances of middle-class families, too.

Consequences for Families, Corporations and the Nation

When women have to leave the workforce because they cannot afford or find quality care, their departure has an impact on the nation's productivity and economic well-being. Sadly, not enough employers have recognized the business value of child care. Many still regard child care as solely a family responsibility, rather than as a collective responsibility that requires the commitment of private and public resources.

In addition, many Americans still regard child care as a women's issue, even though it is an issue that affects men as much as women. The fact that women are joining the workforce at an unprecedented rate is creating a new phenomenon called "Daddy Stress." The traditional family, in which men were the major breadwinners and women were the caregivers, is quickly becoming an anomaly. In many families, when something goes wrong with child care arrangements, fathers are often as stressed as mothers.

In short, every American has a stake in improving the quality, affordability and availability of child care. Inadequate child care policies affect impoverished families and children at-risk, but they also affect middle- and upper-class Americans. Women and men at every level of the workforce and in all economic strata are feeling the pinch.

Child care is an umbrella term that takes into account many different arrangements. Child care services cover children from infancy to preschool to after school. They include the following:

- Child Care Center: A nonresidential facility for a group of children
- Family Child Care: Provided in a private residence other than a child's home
- In-Home Care: Provided within the child's home by a person other than a parent or relative
- Relative Care: Provided by a relative other than the parent, either in the child's home or the relative's home

The NCJW Campaign

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a volunteer organization with over a century-long history of community service and advocacy to improve the well-being of women, children and families. The organization is committed to enhancing the status of women, whether they work within or outside the home.

In 1972, NCJW's landmark study, *Windows on Day Care*, documented disturbing inadequacies in the country's child care delivery system. The study helped usher in a national debate on child care, which ultimately resulted in improvements in regulations and availability.

Despite these gains, many of the conditions revealed in *Windows on Day Care* remain at a crisis level. Nearly three decades later, many of the recommendations included in the original study are still relevant. Although there have been significant increases in certain resources, the child care system is still failing parents and their children.

To highlight the continuing problems and to help work toward a resolution of these issues, NCJW has commissioned this report. Because a number of national and statewide child care reports have been released in the intervening years, rather than begin collecting new data, NCJW has decided to synthesize what we know from this research. The product is a portrait of child care as we know it today.

The United States is a country of vast potential and wealth. With a strong economy, the time has never been better for a recommitment to this issue. NCJW hopes that this fresh look at the state of child care will move the stalled national dialogue forward.

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NCJW HOPES THAT THIS FRESH LOOK AT THE STATE OF CHILD CARE WILL MOVE THE STALLED NATIONAL DIALOGUE FORWARD.

Child Care in the United States: 1972 vs. 1999

1972	1999*
NCJW publishes *Windows on Day Care.*	NCJW publishes *Opening a New Window on Child Care.*
Women with children ■ 50% with children over 6 work ■ 30% with children under 6 work	**Women with children** ■ 78% with children over 6 work ■ 60% with children under 6 work
Shortfall of child care center openings ■ NA	**Shortfall of child care center openings** ■ 43 states unable to serve all low-income children's needs ■ Children of families at all income levels on waiting lists of 12 months or more
Who cares for children under 6 while parents work ■ 50% cared for by a parent or relative ■ 6% in center-based care ■ 33% in non-relatives' homes ■ 11% other (children brought to work, etc.)	**Who cares for children under 5 while parents work** ■ 48% cared for by a parent or relative ■ 30% in center-based care ■ 21% by non-relatives ■ 1% other
Quality of care ■ Almost no quality care is available for infants and toddlers. ■ Nearly 100% of centers provide only custodial care. ■ 51% of nonprofit centers are mediocre, 28% are good; 35% of proprietary centers are mediocre, 50% are poor. ■ Low and poverty-level wages are paid to child care staff, with few benefits, high turnover, little professional training.	**Quality of care** ■ Almost no quality care is available for infants and toddlers. ■ 80% of centers are mediocre at best; however, many examples of high-quality child care centers are found nationwide. ■ Low and poverty-level wages are paid to child care staff, with few benefits, high turnover, little professional training and no real wage increase in three decades.
Research ■ Little research on quality child care	**Research** ■ Several landmark studies show positive effects of quality child care on children (increased curiosity; ability to share, understand rules, create friendships; school-readiness) at all economic levels.
Affordability ■ Costs are too high for parents at all income levels.	**Affordability** ■ Costs are too high for parents at all income levels. ■ Limited federal subsidies available and only 10% of children eligible for federal child care assistance are actually receiving it.
Standards ■ No federal standards exist, and there is poor enforcement of state standards where they exist.	**Standards** ■ No federal standards exist, and there is poor enforcement of state standards where they exist.
Employer support/involvement ■ NA	**Employer support/involvement** ■ Employers contribute 1% of total spent on child care.
Older children ■ NA	**Older children** ■ Lack of affordable, quality school-age programs results in 5 to 7 million "latchkey" children nationwide.

* Where 1999 data was unavailable, the most recent data available was used.

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A New Look at an Old Problem

The challenges confronting the families who seek to enroll their children in child care are very much like the challenges facing an Olympian track star: every hurdle the runner successfully leaps is followed by another.

Demand for Child Care Is Exploding

The first hurdle is availability. Because women are joining the workforce in unprecedented numbers, the demand for child care is now outstripping the supply of available slots. Overall, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 72 percent of women with children under 18 and 78 percent of women with school-age children are working today. That represents a major societal shift from the 1940s, when less than 20 percent of women with children worked. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports the following trends:

- In 1947 just over 25 percent of women with children over the age of six worked. In 1972, about 50 percent were working; and in 1998, 78 percent.
- Those with younger children also have entered the workforce at dramatic rates. In 1947 a little more than 12 percent of women with children younger than six were working. In 1972, about 30 percent were working, and in 1996, nearly 60 percent.
- Through the year 2005, women are expected to account for 60 percent of the new labor force entrants. If these trends hold, the participation of women in the workforce will grow at double the rate for men.

Because families confront ever-rising costs of health care, education and child care, few are able to make ends meet on one income. In these families, including a growing number of middle-income wage earners, second incomes are viewed as essential, not supplemental.

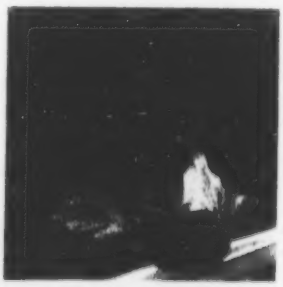
Data from a 1997 report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics also show that more women are working because they are single parents. The BLS says that in 1998, about 25 percent of children were in families headed by a single parent, up from less than 10 percent in 1960. A 1997 AFL-CIO survey showed that 52 percent of women respondents said they contributed at least half of their family's household income.

The welfare law passed by Congress in 1996 will continue to result in even more women entering the labor market. The measure mandated states to impose work requirements on single parents with young children who receive federal cash assistance. While many children of former welfare recipients now holding jobs are currently in child care, many more are not being served.

A report by the Children's Defense Fund showed in 1998 that 43 states said they did not think they could serve all the low-income children who needed child care. Iowa, for example, served 11,000 families, but estimated that 90,000 families needed help. In California, up to 200,000 were waiting for care; in Massachusetts, 17,000; and in Minnesota, 7,000.

But low-income children are not the only ones waiting for care. Children in all income strata are sitting on waiting lists–from California to Washington, D.C.–for periods of 12 months and longer.

A teacher in Neon, KY, relies on the combination of a babysitter, family and friends to provide child care. If the babysitter is sick, everyone's schedule is turned upside down. She pays half of her salary for this arrangement. She and her husband cannot possibly consider having another child.



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FAMILIES PAY ONLY ABOUT 23 PERCENT OF PUBLIC COLLEGE TUITION –BUT THEY PAY ABOUT 60 PERCENT OF THE COST OF CHILD CARE.

The Cost of Child Care Is Prohibitive

Even if parents are lucky enough to find quality child care services, they must then confront another important hurdle: affordability. The cost of child care is not just a concern for low-income parents; it affects all parents. A 1998 Census Bureau analysis showed that no matter what their income, child care is the third greatest expense after housing and food for families with children between the ages of three and five.

Many Americans spend a considerable portion of their working lives accumulating the assets necessary to pay for their children's college education. For most of these same families, however, child care is as expensive or more costly than a college education. A 1998 study by the Children's Defense Fund found that the average cost of child care for a four-year-old in urban areas is more than the average cost of public college tuition in all but one state. For infants, child care costs more than public college tuition in every state. The same study showed that in cities in 15 states, child care costs twice as much as the tuition at a public college.

Yet when it comes to paying for child care, families are pretty much on their own–the government makes more assistance available for higher education than it does for early child care. Families pay about 60 percent of the total annual estimated cost for child care and early education; the remainder comes from direct government subsidies for low-income families or tax credits. In comparison, families pay only about 23 percent of the cost of public higher education, according to *Financing Child Care in the United States*, a 1997 report financed by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Notably, the report found that the private sector contributes very little to support child care initiatives–less than 1 percent of the overall costs that confront families.

A study published by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, *The Future of Children*, reported that families spend an average of $4,000 to $6,000 a year on child care, and some spend as much as $10,000. The numbers confirm the inescapable conclusion that the costs of child care are a burden for all but the very rich.

Andrew and Alisa of Long Island, NY, both speech pathologists, have had to rearrange their careers to provide child care for their son. Unable to find age appropriate care, Andrew left his job and works as an independent consultant, while Alisa works half a day in a job share situation. Additionally, both Andrew's and Alisa's mothers watch their grandson during the week, providing a safety net that many parents do not have.

Of course, the closer a family is to poverty, the greater the financial burden of child care. The Census Bureau calculates that parents who are not low income spend about 7.5 percent of their income on child care. Yet in the 23 states with the highest child care costs, a family with an infant and a four-year-old would have to spend *half* its income on child care if both parents worked full-time at the minimum wage.

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Cost of Child Care vs. College Tuition

State	Average Annual Cost of Child Care (for 4-year-olds)	Average Annual Cost of Public College Tuition
Alabama	$3,000-$4,000	$2,363
Alaska	$5,000-$6,000	$2,552
Arizona	$3,000-$4,000	$2,009
Arkansas	$3,000-$5,000	$2,255
California	$4,888	$2,731
Colorado	$4,035	$2,562
Connecticut	$6,487	$4,105
Delaware	$4,531	$4,180
Florida	$3,813	$1,789
Georgia	$3,900	$2,244
Hawaii	$4,744	$2,298
Idaho	$3,000-$5,000	$1,973
Illinois	$4,921	$3,525
Indiana	$3,224	$3,200
Iowa	$4,458	$2,655
Kansas	$3,000-$7,000	$2,223
Kentucky	$3,276	$2,241
Louisiana	$3,264	$2,230
Maine	$5,000-$7,000	$3,639
Maryland	$4,968	$3,848
Massachusetts	$7,119	$4,266
Michigan	$4,970	$3,986
Minnesota	$6,072	$3,539
Mississippi	$3,172	$2,497
Missouri	$4,000-$5,000	$3,230
Montana	$4,000-$5,000	$2,488
Nebraska	$4,000-$5,000	$2,269
Nevada	N/A	N/A
New Hampshire	$5,096	$4,644
New Jersey	$4,000-$6,000	$4,269
New Mexico	$3,900-$4,500	$2,016
New York	$5,612	$3,797
North Carolina	$3,696	$1,841
North Dakota	$4,083	$2,381
Ohio	$4,083	$2,381
Oklahoma	$3,536	$1,936
Oregon	$4,000-$6,000	$3,407
Pennsylvania	$5,000-$7,000	$4,994
Rhode Island	$4,784	$3,907
South Carolina	$3,744	$3,206
South Dakota	$4,000-$5,000	$2,727
Tennessee	$3,000-$4,000	$2,051
Texas	$3,335	$2,022
Utah	$3,266	$2,010
Vermont	$5,000-$7,000	$6,538
Virginia	$4,000-$7,000	$3,962
Washington	$4,992	$2,928
West Virginia	$3,120	$2,088
Wisconsin	$4,000-$8,000	$2,747
Wyoming	$3,000-$5,000	$2,144

Source: Children's Defense Fund

Data on average university costs from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment" and "Institutional Characteristics" surveys, October 1997.

Data on child care center costs collected by a joint survey of the Children's Defense Fund and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, December 1997.

And although public funds have definitely increased over the last decade, in many states low-income children still are not receiving assistance because the states impose cutoff barriers below the federal guidelines, which allow subsidies to families who earn 85 percent of the state's median income. A report drafted in October 1999 by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shows that only 10 percent of children eligible for federal child care assistance in 1998 received it.

The report, *Access to Child Care for Low-Income Working Families*, says that 1.5 million of an estimated 14.7 million children eligible for subsidy under federal income limits received child care assistance. The percentage of children helped ran from a low of 4 percent in Mississippi to a high of 24 percent in West Virginia. A family of three earning $15,000 under these guidelines would pay between 1 and 7 percent of their income on child care if they received the subsidies. Without the subsidies, the same family would pay 24 to 45 percent of their income on child care.

All but nine states have imposed tighter requirements. As a result, only 10 million children are eligible for aid under the state guidelines set in 1998.

Good Quality Child Care Is Essential for All

Finding quality care is another daunting hurdle confronting parents. A 1997 synthesis of research, presented in a policy brief published by the National Center for Early Development and Learning *at* the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, showed that all the reviewed studies consistently rated quality of care below minimum levels, with infant programs rating below preschool programs.

One study–the *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study* published in 1995 by researchers at the University of North Carolina, the University of Colorado, UCLA and Yale University–came to equally disturbing conclusions. The study followed 826 students from 401 day care centers in California, Colorado, Connecticut and North Carolina. It found that six out of seven child care centers provided mediocre to poor care, and one in eight provided care that could jeopardize children's safety and development.

The difficulty in finding quality child care is a concern for anyone who needs child care. According to recent brain research, all children can benefit from stimulating environments, no matter what their income level.

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SIX OUT OF SEVEN CHILD CARE CENTERS PROVIDED MEDIOCRE TO POOR CARE, AND ONE IN EIGHT PROVIDED CARE THAT COULD JEOPARDIZE CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND DEVELOPMENT.

Sorting socks by color, playing peek-a-boo and using blocks and beads are the kinds of exercise a developing brain needs. Such activities can permanently enhance cognitive, motor and language development. Further, the research shows that the experiences and attachments children form in their first three years have a decisive, long-lasting impact on their learning.

These are the kinds of experiences children receive in high-quality child care situations. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) followed 1,364 children for seven years. It determined that the better the care, the more likely children would score well on cognitive and language tests. They also behaved better and cooperated more with their mothers, and earned higher scores on measurements of language comprehension and school readiness.

NICHD said the best child care settings were characterized by smaller groups, high adult-child ratios, less authoritarian attitudes expressed by caregivers and physical environments that were safe, clean and stimulating. The quality of the time children spent in child care was found to be more important than the quantity of time they spent.

Similarly, a 1999 update of the *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study* found that children in higher-quality preschool classrooms showed better language ability and pre-math skills, viewed themselves more positively, had warmer relationships with their teachers and were more advanced in social skills than children in lower-quality classrooms. The influence of the quality of child care was found to be important for children of all family backgrounds.

One of the study's more interesting conclusions was that high-quality child care had a lasting effect on children. All the positive developments noted in preschool years continued at least through kindergarten and, in many cases, through the end of the second grade. And now researchers are beginning to amass evidence that the effects last into adulthood.

A landmark study released in October 1999 by the U.S. Department of Education, called the *Abecedarian Project*, followed children from 111 low-income families in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, from infancy to age 21. It showed that good early-childhood education positively affects reading and mathematics skills. Participants in the study consistently outperformed their peers in cognitive and academic tests, were more likely to attend college or hold high-skilled jobs and were less likely to become parents by age 21.

These studies all suggest that child care needs to be more than just a custodial arrangement. The exposure of children to positive learning experiences is critical to their emotional, social and intellectual development in the first few years of their lives. In some cases, depriving children of these experiences can cause irreversible damage. The studies also suggest that high-quality child care is not an issue that affects only low-income children or children considered at-risk. Good child care is important to all children.

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THE HIGHEST-PAID WORKERS IN CHILD CARE CENTERS ARE NOW MAKING LESS MONEY IN INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS THAN THEY WERE ALMOST THREE DECADES AGO.

A Community of Caring for Children and Families ...

"...new research on brain development shows that a high level of interaction with parents, family, caregivers, friends and teachers impacts upon the healthy development of the brain. The degree of family and community involvement is critical to attaining optimal early childhood development.

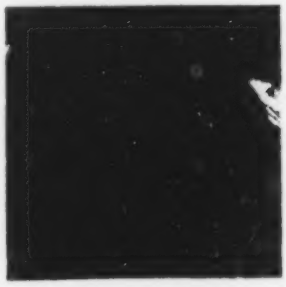
NBCDI has found that there is a strong correlation between the cultural competency and diversity of organizations, and the level of involvement of parents in their children's education. Organizations that take steps to reflect the demographics and cultural values of their clients actually become a part of the community, rather than being viewed as disconnected institutions."

Excerpted from *Resources to Build Diverse Leadership*, published by The African American Early Childhood Resource Center, and *Paths to African American Leadership Positions in Early Childhood Education*, a study of the National Black Child Development Institute

Barriers to Achieving Quality Care

At least two paradoxes confront working parents. The first is that in most economic sectors there is a correlation between dollars spent and quality. This is not always the case with child care. As noted above, some parents spend significant sums to care for their children and still walk away dissatisfied.

The second paradox is that in most industries the wages of workers rise when the demand for their services increases. In the world of child care, however, the demand for skilled child care workers has never been greater, yet wages remain extraordinarily low. And because the average child care worker cannot earn a living wage, turnover is high and the quality of care suffers. This is especially significant because the role of the child care provider is considered pivotal. Numerous studies underscore the link between really good results and the dedication, knowledge and compassion of the caregiver.



In 1970, the median salary for nonprofessional teacher aides and assistants was $3,000 per year, which was considered the poverty level for a family of three, according to NCJW's *Windows on Day Care*. Adjusted for inflation, the same $3,000 today would amount to an annual salary of $12,404. The 1998 update of the *National Child Care Staffing Study (NCCSS)*, produced by the Center for the Child Care Workforce, found that the average highest-paid teaching assistant in child care centers earned $12,250, which today is just under the poverty level for a family of three. That means these workers have received no real wage increase in nearly three decades, and they remain impoverished by government standards. Furthermore, most work without benefits.

The lot of the best-trained teachers in child care centers is no better. The median salary of the highest-paid teachers in child care centers in 1970 was $5,000, NCJW found. Adjusted for inflation, that amounts to $21,003 today. Yet the *NCCSS* survey determined the average salary for these workers in 1998 was $18,988. Although the methodology used in the NCJW and *NCCSS* surveys differs, these figures suggest that the highest-paid workers in child care centers are now making less money in inflation-adjusted dollars than they were almost three decades ago.

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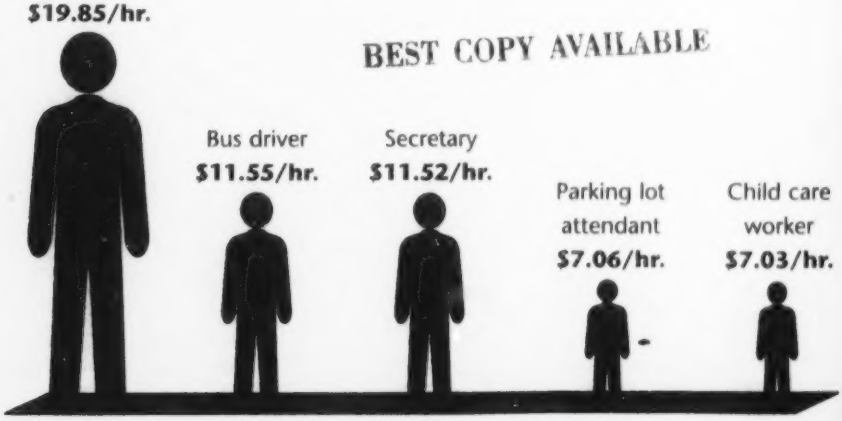
Who are these workers? About 98 percent of the caregivers in child care centers are women, including one-third who are women of color. The U.S. Department of Labor says they earn far less than the median earnings for all workers, which was a little more than $26,000 in 1997, and less than the median earnings for bus drivers, janitors and bartenders. Less than 5 percent of them belong to collective bargaining units. And because they are paid so little, many are forced to moonlight, and few have health insurance or retirement benefits. Many of these workers have their own child care costs that they cannot afford.

The major consequence of low compensation is high turnover. The Center for the Child Care Workforce reported in 1998 that 31 percent of all teaching staff at child care centers leave their jobs every year. In some places, the rate is much higher. The Metropolitan Council on Child Care in Kansas City reports annual turnover at 42 percent, a rate surpassed only by the turnover rates of parking lot and gas station attendants. By comparison, turnover among elementary school teachers is less than 7 percent per year.

Another oddity in the child care system is that workers are poorly compensated even though public investments in child care continue to rise. The reason: government subsidies are below the market value for child care tuition. Also, the public subsidies are not targeted at hiring staff or training them.

For example, the 1998 update of the National Child Care Staffing Study found that more child care centers received public dollars in 1997 than in 1988, allowing more of them to assist low-income families with child care costs. But because this increased public funding was rarely targeted to quality improvements or increased compensation, these dollars did not result in better wages or lower staff turnover. In fact, the opposite is true. Centers that as a group are paying the lowest wages have also experienced the greatest increase in public subsidies.

Median Hourly Wages
Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997



"Quality child care is an insurance policy for our nation's future. I worked in child care for 12 years, but low wages forced me to leave and seek employment in the food and beverage industry so I could put myself through school."
A 31 year old college student from Newport, RI.

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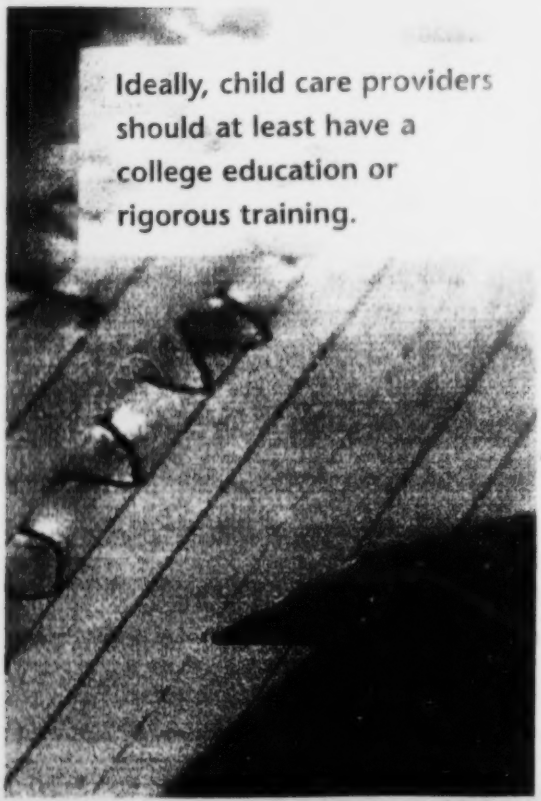
The Professional Development Barrier

Low compensation, however, is not the only barrier to attracting and retaining quality child care workers. Another contributing factor is that relatively low numbers of employees are able to take advantage of professional development and training.

Some states have understood the need to raise requirements for child care teaching staff and have created career ladders based on the training. But they've done so without linking the training to higher wages, so employees have no reason to seek the training. As a result, the industry suffers from a chronic shortage of sufficiently-trained personnel.



Ideally, child care providers should at least have a college education or rigorous training. A 1996 study by the Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades found, however, that 40 percent of preschool teachers had only a high school diploma, and another 10 percent had only a two-year community college degree. Preschool teachers received only about 10 hours of training a year.

Overall, 41 states in 1998 did not require family child care providers to have any child development training. Thirty-one states did not require providers caring for children in centers to have any child development training. This is unfortunate because better trained staff are more likely to create warm, caring environments that are responsive to the needs of children and that help them to succeed in school.

States are attempting to address these inadequacies by drafting licensing regulations that ensure the safety and quality of child care. The regulations usually cover staff-child ratios, group sizes, physical space, staff training and other issues. Unfortunately, in 1999 only nine states required all family child care homes to be licensed, regardless of quality.

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Lack of School-Age Care Means Higher Crime Rates

Families with school-age children also face hurdles. Because child care for these families is often inaccessible and unaffordable, too many children are spending their daytime hours alone. The Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College calculated in 1997 that 5 million children are left unsupervised after school each week. Instead of receiving the help they need to succeed in school, children across all income levels are spending many hours a week alone in settings where they are not learning anything to improve their emotional, intellectual and social development. Even worse, they are in settings that encourage them to get into trouble.

FBI data compiled in 1997 by the National Center for Juvenile Justice show that the peak hours for violent juvenile crimes are between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. The first hour after the end of school is the most violent: juvenile crimes triple in that hour. Data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice show that 280 children are arrested for violent crimes every day.

EMPLOYERS CONTRIBUTE ONLY 1 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL SPENT ON CHILD CARE IN THIS COUNTRY.

Research also has shown that latchkey children in all income groups are at significantly greater risk for truancy, stress, receiving poor grades, risk-taking behavior and substance abuse. A 1997 Auburn University study and a 1990 University of California study support these conclusions. These are the reasons why most police chiefs agreed in a 1999 Northeastern University poll that an increased government investment in school-age programs was a very effective crime-fighting tool. They favored this approach even over hiring more police officers or trying juveniles as adults.

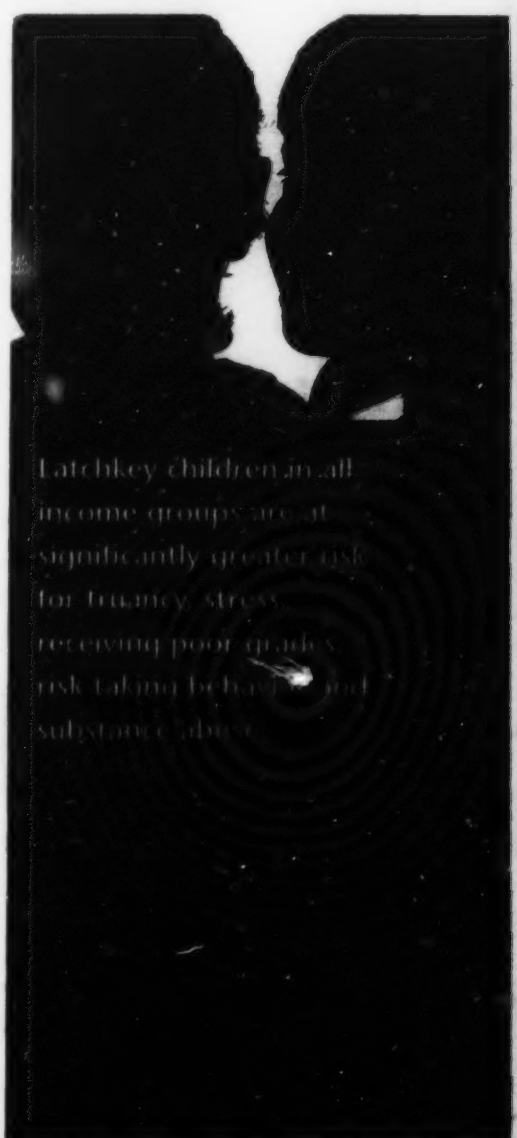
The Carnegie Corporation, in a report entitled *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours*, examined a number of high-quality school-age programs and found that among the characteristics they share are the following: access to caring adult mentors; opportunities to interact with peers in a positive environment; safe havens, even in crime-ridden neighborhoods; and activities that teach such skills as goal setting, decision making, communicating, problem solving and conflict resolution.

Roles for Employers

The business community, reflecting society's own biases about women in the workforce, for a long time has been reluctant to get involved in child care. Many have believed it was the role of the family, not the business community, to make child care arrangements. Some have believed that women did not belong in the workforce, and if they made the choice to work, then they had to take responsible steps on their own to resolve their scheduling issues. Many also have not seen any bottom-line reason to get into the business of child care.

Some of these attitudes are changing, but not quickly enough. Employers contribute only 1 percent of the total spent on child care in this country, according to *Financing Child Care in the United States*. As a result, even though we are now in a full-employment economy, employers are not finding enough qualified workers. A 1998 survey by the Families and Work Institute concluded that 40 percent of employers were having difficulty filling low-wage or entry-level positions, and even more–68 percent–were experiencing difficulties filling skilled positions. If more companies understood their responsibility to provide families with access to reliable, affordable and high-quality child care arrangements, employers would be able to tap a broader labor pool that includes more skilled workers.

A 1997 survey of employees by the Families and Work Institute showed that women with children under 13 have higher rates of absenteeism, often because of child care arrangements that break down. Also, the Institute's studies have shown that women who have more stable child care arrangements are more satisfied with their lives in general, are less stressed and report coping better.



EMPLOYERS WHO HAVE TAKEN A PROGRESSIVE VIEW TOWARD CHILD CARE HAVE BENEFITED FROM IT.

What Employers Can Do

Companies of all sizes and types can help employees meet their child care needs. Some options include:

- Setting up a child care resource and referral system
- Allowing for staggered work schedules, job-sharing, tele-commuting, or flex-time
- Setting up a dependent care assistance plan for employees to pay for child care with pre-tax payroll deductions
- Reimbursing child care costs during unanticipated employee overtime
- Providing emergency back-up child care arrangements for limited periods
- Reserving spaces in a child care center with costs covered by parents who use them, or by the employer, if they are unused
- Providing direct child care vouchers or subsidies
- Providing on- or near-site child care at low or no cost

A survey by the Conference Board arrived at similar conclusions. The survey found that 62 percent of employers who offered child care reported higher worker morale; 54 percent reported reduced absenteeism; 52 percent reported increased productivity; and 37 percent reported lower turnover.

A recent Families and Work Institute survey completed for the Treasury Department showed that helping employees with child care is not an onerous responsibility. Consider the following:

- More than two-thirds of the 1,100 respondents say benefits from child care programs are greater than the costs of providing them, or are cost-neutral.
- Three-fourths say the benefits of flexible scheduling exceed costs or are cost-neutral.
- Three-fourths say the benefits of family leave policies exceed costs or are cost-neutral.

The employers who have taken a progressive view toward child care have benefited from it. A recent Treasury Working Group on Child Care reviewed a large body of research on child care affordability and its impact on women's decisions to work. It cited the Conference Board conclusions and the following:

- First Tennessee Bank reported reduced turnover costs of more than $1 million annually from work/family programs, including more flexible scheduling.
- Lexis-Nexis reduced operating expenses by more than 45 percent through a telecommuting program that yielded savings from higher productivity, fewer facilities and other factors.
- Johnson & Johnson saved more than $4 for every $1 invested in work/family programs, including child care resources and referral information.
- Lancaster Laboratories attributed its low turnover rate –half the industry average–to an on-site child care center.

Further, the Treasury Working Group studies concluded that reducing child care costs reduces labor market barriers for women who want or need to enter the labor market.

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Conclusion

Nearly three decades ago the National Council of Jewish Women published a landmark report that documented the growing child care needs of families in the United States. The report was issued at a time when women were entering the workforce in record numbers and the country was involved in a national debate on child care policy.

Despite the passage of time, significant problems persist. The only equitable feature of our child care problem today is that many children are treated with the same relative neglect. Eighty percent of the nation's children spend their days–up to 50 hours per week–in poor or mediocre child care settings. One four-state study conducted by the *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study* team found that 40 percent of the infant care is of such poor quality that it jeopardizes children's health, safety or development. Many communities lack affordable, quality school-age programs, and millions of children are left home alone. Professional quality care is scarce in a marketplace in which child care workers do not earn as much as parking lot attendants. Child care subsidies available to low-income families are very limited. Moderate-income families struggle to afford child care that typically costs as much as a public college education.

Even though the evidence is mounting that early, quality care is critical for a child's later success in school, policymakers continue to turn a blind eye to the needs of children.

NCJW believes that the lack of quality, affordable, accessible child care is not just the personal problem of working parents. It concerns all those who care about the emotional and cognitive well-being of children, and all who care about our nation's productivity and potential. To ensure quality child care requires the collective brain power, will and resources of government, private industry, nonprofit organizations, educators and parents. NCJW will work in partnership with these stakeholders to put child care at the top of the nation's political and social agenda.

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Recommendations

The National Council of Jewish Women offers the following recommendations to help ensure affordable, accessible, quality child care.

To Ensure Affordability

Increase federal, state and local funding for child care and school-age programs. Several important programs need to be fully funded so that they cover all eligible children.

- The Child Care Development Block Grant provides states with funds to help families pay for child care. The block grant currently serves only one of 10 eligible children. The program must be expanded, not only to serve more children, but to provide additional funds to states to bolster quality.
- The 21st Century Learning Centers, a federal program for school-age children, must be increased so that communities can provide constructive before- and after-school programs to help children succeed in school and to reduce truancy, substance abuse and other risk-taking behavior.
- Head Start must be expanded so that educators can reach more preschool-age children. Funding for Early Head Start, aimed at families with infants and toddlers, also must be increased.
- Expand and improve the Dependent Care Tax Credit. The DCTC reduces taxes for employment-related dependent care expenses. The amounts of the credits must be increased and made refundable so that families with low or no income tax liability can benefit.

To Ensure the Availability of Quality Programs

Improve licensing, standards and program evaluation mechanisms to ensure that children participate in programs that are safe and that meet their physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs. There are currently no federal standards for child care programs and few incentives for states to improve licensing and enforcement mechanisms. NCJW recommends state and federal standards to promote the highest quality of child care. The standards should be coupled with federal and state funding for enforcement and funding for providers to make the improvements necessary to bring their facilities up to standard.

Increase the compensation and training of child care workers. The low wages and lack of benefits and training for child care workers may be the biggest impediment to providing quality services. Funds should be available so that child care workers receive wages and benefits equal to those earned by other educators. Additionally, affordable, in-service training and professional development programs must be made available to workers. Grant and loan forgiveness programs should support and encourage child care workers to participate in early childhood education programs.

To Ensure Employer Support

Provide outreach programs that help employers realize the importance of child care. Many are unaware of the positive effects that high-quality child care can have on their employees' attitudes, productivity and absenteeism rates. The public and private sectors, working together, should ensure high-profile outreach programs to employers that describe not only the importance of child care, but the options available to employers. The education campaign would promote employer support for affordable parental leave, flexible scheduling, telecommuting, the establishment of on-site facilities and subsidies for off-site care.

To Ensure Consumer Education

Expand resource and referral services available to parents and provide public information on how to select and monitor quality care.

GOOD CHILD CARE PROMOTES CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING AND LATER SUCCESS IN SCHOOL.

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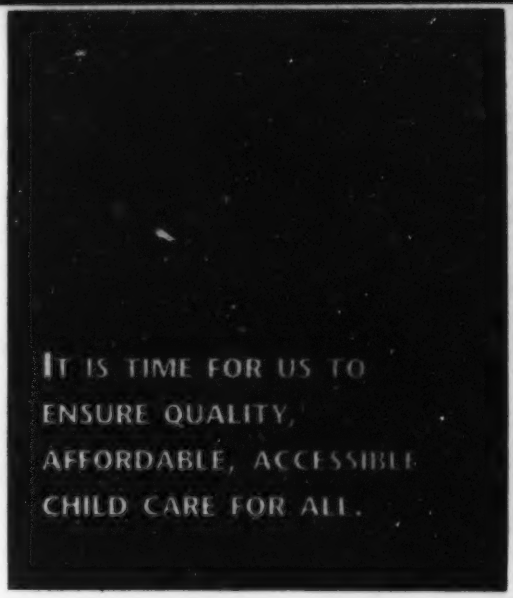
Statement of Principles

For nearly three decades, parents, educators, and business and community leaders have become increasingly concerned about the lack of quality child care available to most families. Good child care promotes children's well-being and later success in school and is essential for working parents in a growing, productive economy. It is time for us to ensure quality, affordable, accessible child care for all.



To meet our child care needs, we agree to the following:

1. All children are entitled to quality child care. Research has shown conclusively that good child care promotes children's well-being and later success in school. A widespread commitment of resources is necessary to ensure that quality care becomes a reality.

2. All families are entitled to affordable child care. Child care costs are a concern for families of all incomes. Federal, state and local government must commit significant resources to address the child care needs of families.

3. More places for children in child care are needed. Demand for child care has never been greater. Every child in need of child care should be accommodated.

4. Child care workers must be paid a livable wage with incentives for professional development. Studies show that quality child care depends on good, long-term relationships between children and well-trained child care providers. However, many child care workers receive poverty-level wages and have no incentive to further their training. Children will not receive quality care until workers earn a decent wage and receive high-quality training. Compensation must be linked to professional development.

5. School-age children must have quality child care options. FBI data suggest that latchkey children of all income groups are at-risk for truancy, risk-taking behavior and substance abuse. Steps must be taken to develop safe, affordable, before- and after-school programs for children.

6. The business community has an important role to play in improving child care. Studies show that child care problems affect worker recruitment, productivity and retention. Employers should take steps to help address the child care needs of their workforce.

7. Government, private industry, educators, nonprofit organizations and parents must commit to a partnership to improve the child care options for all families. The child care problems this country faces are so deeply embedded that our collective energies, brainpower and resources will be necessary to solve them.

Windows on Child Care Funders

In Honor of Shirley I. and Harold Leviton

The Helen Matchett DeMario Foundation

NCJW Long Beach (CA) Section

NCJW South Shore (NY) Section

Robert B. & Shirley K. Haspel Endowment Fund

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